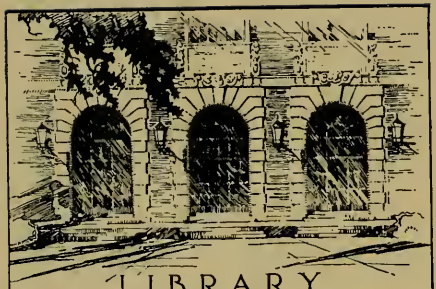

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NATIONAL REFORM UNION PAMPHLETS.

MR. BRIGHT

ON

REDISTRIBUTION.

[BEING A REFUTATION BY LORD SALISBURY HIMSELF OF HIS MISREPRESENTATION OF MR. BRIGHT].

BY

WILLIAM LORD.

"Out of thine own mouth will I judge thee."—*St. Luke*, xix. 22.

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MR. BRIGHT ON REDISTRIBUTION.

THE House of Lords has rejected the Franchise Bill of the Government. As a plea for such action it is urged that Redistribution is omitted from the measure. Lord Salisbury is mainly responsible for the loss of the Bill. Having outraged the feelings of the people, he seeks to palliate his egregious blunder, and at Sheffield he held up Mr. Bright as an exponent of the views he (Lord Salisbury) held. This feat was accomplished by a truncated quotation from a speech which Mr. Bright made at Bradford in 1859. Within a week Lord Salisbury again referred to the Bradford speech, but carefully veiled the mutilated form in which he first quoted it. Tenaciously, however, he clung to the quotation. He issued his mandate that it should be the "text for every Conservative sermon." Conservative speakers and writers of every rank and calibre have gratified Lord Salisbury's wish. If texts are desirable in political controversy, "Out of thine own mouth will I judge thee" is one from a greater authority than Mr. Bright, and one singularly appropriate for the exposure of Lord Salisbury's gross misrepresentation of the people's Tribune which will be found in these pages.

Mr. Bright's name, synonymous with Freedom and Justice, is endeared to the hearts of the thinking masses. No "gibes or flouts or sneers" from Lord Salisbury can rob Mr. Bright of the love the people bear for him. Lord Salisbury cannot undermine Mr. Bright's character for political consistency. On the question of the day—"Should the Franchise Bill be taken by itself?" Lord Salisbury shall—whether he likes it or not—defend Mr. Bright. Lord Salisbury shall stultify himself on his own text.

The following extract is from Lord Salisbury's speech at Sheffield on July 22, 1884:

"Now I won't dwell upon the importance of redistribution, because it has been enforced by a more powerful voice than mine. You have lately had presented by Mr. Leng in that

admirable newspaper which has done so much for the Conservative cause, you have lately had extracts from the speeches of Mr. Bright upon this subject. Well, now, Mr. Bright is a great authority upon this matter, and I will ask your pardon if I just repeat to you what he said, that you may know how absolutely essential it is that redistribution and franchise should go together. This is what Mr. Bright said at Bradford in 1859: 'Repudiate without mercy any Bill, by any Government,' that is what Mr. Bright said—'by any Government, whatever its franchise, whatever its seeming concessions may be, if it does not redistribute the seats.' Mr. Bright goes on: 'The question of redistribution is the very soul of the question, and unless you get that, you will be deceived; and when the Bill is passed, you may possibly have to lament that you are not in the position in which you would like to find yourself.' Now, pray understand that if the House of Lords is vilified now, it is vilified for following the counsels of Mr. Bright."—*Daily Papers, July* 23/84.

The following is an extract from Lord Salisbury's speech at the Cannon Street Hotel, London, on July 28th, 1884:

"Why, having this great work to do, did they deliberately depart from the practice of all who have gone before them, and raise up gratuitous difficulties in their way? It was not from any ignorance on their part of the importance of redistribution as an integral portion of Reform. I need only quote that sentence of Mr. Bright's—which has been quoted again and again, and which I would like to see prefixed as a sort of text to every Conservative sermon—'Repudiate without mercy any Bill that any Government whatever may introduce, whatever its seeming concessions may be, if it does not redistribute the seats that are obtained from the extinction of small boroughs amongst the large towns.' Mr. Bright seems to imagine that he has entirely

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explained away his utterance given publicly in 1859 by reciting a private note which he says he wrote to Lord Beaconsfield in 1867, and he concludes in the most self-satisfied way that he has entirely explained his previous declaration."—*Daily Papers*, *July* 29/84.

Lord Salisbury flattered Mr. Leng at Sheffield for reproducing in his paper extracts from Mr. Bright's speeches. In the matter of the proclaimed quotation Mr. Leng had sprung no new mine. Lord Salisbury had heard of it sixteen years ago. He had, moreover, referred to it. In 1866 his candour was less warped than it is to-day, and the pointed way in which he referred to Mr. Bright's statement shows that he thoroughly comprehended Mr. Bright's ideas.

On the 13th March, 1866, Lord Cranborne—now Lord Salisbury—addressed the House of Commons in these significant words:

"The hon. gentleman **the Member for Birmingham told an audience some years ago,** as the House has been already reminded by the right hon. member for Calne (Mr. Lowe), **that ANY BILL FOR THE REDISTRIBUTION OF SEATS should be repudiated which did not give a larger number to large towns.**"—*Hansard*, *Vol.* 182, *p.* 229.

By quoting from the same speech we are able to let Lord Salisbury himself say whether he thoroughly understood Mr. Bright's views on the question of taking the Franchise by itself.

Lord Cranborne (now the Marquis of Salisbury) spoke as follows in the House of Commons on the first reading of the Russell and Gladstone Reform Bill of 1866. The extract is a notable one and will be read with great interest:—

"Nobody ever asserted that the particular figure of the franchise was adopted at the instance of the hon. member for Birmingham. We know that the Government have something else to look to besides that hon. member; they have to look to certain great families, to whom it is not entirely convenient that the political power of the country should pass from the control of property; they have to look to the great Whig party, whose historic traditions are not in favour of democracy; and,

consequently, it is possible or certain that the hon. member for Birmingham has not been able to obtain the precise figure of the franchise he desires. **In the main and most important point of this measure, however, the Government have scrupulously and obsequiously followed his dictation. On the chief question, which everybody discussed throughout the winter, 'Will the Government measure include a redistribution of the seats, or will it deal with the suffrage only?"** there was a great difference of opinion among the Radicals. All the old-fashioned Radicals were entirely in favour of including a redistribution of seats in the Bill; **but all the advanced Liberals, and most moderate Liberals, as well as the hon. member for Birmingham, adopted a peculiar line of policy. They pressed upon the Government the expediency of dealing with the franchise in the first Bill, leaving the redistribution of seats for a second Bill. As the hon. gentleman the member for Birmingham is rather skilful in the art of denial, I will venture to read the words he used on this point.** He said:—

'I agree, therefore, that it would be an incumbrance to a 'Suffrage Bill at this moment to interfere with the distribu- 'tion of seats; it would make it more difficult to carry a Bill, 'and whatever distribution of seats you could now make must 'necessarily be trifling and unsatisfactory, and would leave that 'question still unsettled, even for the shortest possible period. 'You will carry such a Bill much more easily. Public opinion 'hereafter will be more ripe to deal with the question of the 'distribution when there are a larger number of electors re- 'turning your members to Parliament. I mean a larger number 'in the different boroughs. You will have what a mechanic 'will call a larger lever and a better Parliament, which would

'deal more satisfactorily with all questions which may come 'before you.' "—*Hansard, Vol.* 182, *pp.* 225-6.

In a subsequent debate, on April 27th, 1866, with a frankness one can admire, Lord Cranborne (the present Lord Salisbury) expressed himself thus :—

"What we want is not that the Seats Bill and the Franchise Bill should proceed *pari passu*—that is to say, one after the other, but what we want is that they should proceed together—that is to say, in one and the same Bill. What we wish for, indeed, is information; but information is not our main object. What we wish for most is control. . . . Until it is known what the constituencies are out of which these fit men are to be taken, it is impossible to tell whether they are fit for the franchise or not."—*Hansard, Vol.* 183, *pp.* 13-15.

Let us now examine the conclusion which Lord Salisbury drew at Sheffield. It is this :—

"Now pray understand that if the House of Lords is vilified now, it is "vilified for following the counsels of Mr. Bright."

The House of Lords, after forty years' wandering in the wilderness, "following the counsels of Mr. Bright"? The House of Lords say that Redistribution and the Franchise should be in one and the same Bill. Is that Mr. Bright's view now? Was it his view thirty years ago? Has it ever been his opinion? Emphatically No.

Speaking in the House of Commons on April 11th, 1854, Mr. Bright gave the following "counsel" :—

"Now, if the noble Lord (Lord John Russell) had simply limited the Bill to the enfranchisement clauses with respect to the county and borough franchises, and to the provision repealing the ratepaying clauses of the existing Act, in all probability the House might have passed the measure, notwithstanding the state of foreign policy. The other clauses, extinguishing 62 seats and redistributing the members to the other constituencies, might then have been left over to some other session, when there would be a

better opportunity of entertaining and discussing them."—*Hansard, Vol.* 132, *p.* 831.

In 1859 Mr. Bright made a speech at Bradford. It was the speech of which Lord Cranborne (the present Marquis of Salisbury) said—

"The Member for Birmingham told an audience that any Bill for the "Redistribution of Seats should be repudiated which did not give a larger "number to large towns."

The reader will find a lengthy extract from the speech. It is only necessary to read the whole of it to see that Mr. Bright never said that a Franchise Bill should be repudiated if it were unaccompanied with a Redistribution scheme.

"My experience teaches me this: that if there be a great question to be carried, if a great principle to be carried into law, if you wish to have on your side the great heart and conscience of the people, it is necessary that you should bid both parties stand aside from your way, and that you should go straight on, not for party objects but for the great object which you and the public have in view. There are several ways in which the question of the distribution of the members—**if there is to be any distribution**—may be treated. In the first place—and it is not exactly the mode of distribution which I am about to speak of, because the members would be left just where they are; but it is possible for the Government to propose, or for anybody else to propose, that all the little boroughs—which now everybody admits ought not to return members to Parliament—should still retain the right of returning them, with the addition of two or three country parishes, whose population added to the population of the little borough would make what would appear to be a sufficient constituency to return a member or members to the House of Commons. Now, we have had some experience of this in several boroughs—for instance, the borough of New Shoreham, I think in Sussex, the borough of Cricklade, and the borough of East Retford. There are several others of

the same description—a little town with the grass growing in every street, a small village here and there—hardly a village five or six miles in one direction, and as much in the other—a few farms, a few labourers, a wheelwright's shop, and so on—and all this is cooked up and made into a parliamentary borough, and Lord Somebody or Mr. Somebody who happens to own the land is, in point of fact, the entire constituency. Now, we shall not give ourselves the least trouble on the question of Reform, if that be the sort of Bill which we are asked to be satisfied with; we had much better remain as we are. There is another mode of treating these boroughs. You may group two or three of them together if you can find them within any reasonable distance, and then you will make a constituency more numerous than there is at present, and you may gain a few members to distribute among larger towns. But this grouping together has great disadvantages. Every man who has represented a borough consisting of several boroughs must know that it has great disadvantages. He must have a committee in every one of them, and if the unhappy system of employing lawyers prevails, then he must have a lawyer in every one of them. And when you have taken all this trouble, and gone to all this expense, you have only put three dead bodies together in the hope of making a living one out of them. Well, now, there is another course still; and that is to take a certain line and disfranchise a considerable number—some number—of small boroughs, and to distribute the seats which you get from them among existing constituencies. You may distribute them—one-half, three-quarters, or all—to increase the county members. That I should take to be a mode of parliamentary reform which would not be satisfactory to the great body of reformers in the kingdom. We know very well what giving members to the counties means as things exist at present. And

we know that such an arrangement as that would necessarily disable the Government, if it were disposed, from giving members to those great towns whose representation is now so wholly inadequate to their population, their property, their taxation, and their general influence in the kingdom. Now the Reform Bill of 1832 gave 63 seats to boroughs, and, I think, 65 seats to counties. I believe generally from that time to this, there has been a feeling amongst all those who are in favour of reform that the Reform Bill gave too large an influence to the counties and to the landed interest in the distribution of members which was made by it. I wish you and your countrymen everywhere to watch this point with the keenest eye possible. **Repudiate without mercy any Bill of any Government, whatever its franchise, whatever its seeming concession may be, if it does not distribute the seats which are obtained by the extinction of small boroughs mainly amongst the great city and town populations of the kingdom.** The question of distribution is the very soul of the question of Reform, and unless you watch that, you will be deceived, and when the Bill is passed, you may possibly turn back to lament that you are not in the position in which you now find yourselves."—*Daily Papers, Jan.* 19, 1859.

Just fourteen months after speaking at Bradford, Mr. Bright made a speech on the second reading of Lord John Russell's Reform Bill. On March 19, 1860, he gave this explicit "counsel":—

"**With regard to the question of distribution of seats, I am one of those who for years have held the opinion that it would be much better to have this question of Reform approached by successive steps.** The difficulty—a notorious difficulty—(I am making no admission I may not as well make)—the notorious difficulty is the disfranchising of 50 or 60 small boroughs which ought to be got

rid of. The difficulty is felt to be so great that every Government has for some time past felt itself incompetent to arrange it. **I took the liberty of recommending the noble Lord, I suppose one year and a half ago, and have done it since repeatedly and publicly, that the Reform Bill that should be introduced should be a Bill that should only settle the question of the suffrage,** and that it should do it simply and generously; **and I thought that after that had been done, both this House and the country would be better prepared to give their attention to the question of the small boroughs, and we might perhaps come to a more satisfactory arrangement."**—*Hansard, Vol.* 157, *pp.* 895-6.

The Tories are in a maze as to what Mr. Bright's views were on the question in 1866. They have scattered broadcast placards and leaflets containing a quotation from Mr. Bright's Bradford speech of 1859. They have led the public to believe he uttered the expression in 1886, because in that year it was quoted in Parliament, and as a quotation appears in *Hansard* of that year. Lord Carnarvon himself has been duped. Speaking at Hedsor Park on September 13th, 1884, he said—

"There remain also some famous expressions of Mr. Bright, who has succeeded in advertising his opinion on the franchise and redistribution far more widely than any other speeches that he has ever made. Gentlemen, read them, observe them, and make them the texts of your own teaching to your political friends, and remember this, that if Mr. Bright was right in 1866, why are we to be scouted and denounced for holding identically the same opinion in 1884?"

Let us examine the "famous expressions" from Mr. Bright's speeeh delivered at Rochdale on 3rd of January, 1866. "Read them, observe them!" and say whether the Tories hold in 1884 "*identically the same opinions as Mr. Bright held in* 1866."

Mr. Bright said:—

"I believe it will be necessary and advantageous to proceed

on this question (of Reform) step by step. What are the steps? Fortunately, perhaps, I am not—as my hon. friend and some of his ill-advised friends here would apparently have me be—one of the exalted and sacred number of statesmen who are called the advisers of the Queen. Still, every honest man who stands before his countrymen to discuss intelligently and honestly public questions, is necessarily and at the same time both an adviser of the Queen and of the people. Under that cry, and from this platform, if you will permit me I will discuss this question as it presents itself to my mind. I hold that there are three things necessary to give completion to the constitution of this country, and to confer upon the people a fair and real representation. The first is such an extension of the suffrage as shall leave us in this position—that no *class* is excluded. I do not say such an extension as shall leave us in the position that no *man* shall be excluded. There are many persons now, some of what we call socially the highest class, who are, from one cause or another, excluded. But those classes are not excluded; whereas the greatest class of all—the five millions who are the source of the greatest industry of this kingdom—is excluded by the clauses of the Reform Act of 1832. Such an extension of the suffrage, then, as shall exclude no class is absolutely necessary. I believe, also, that the shelter of the ballot will be found to be absolutely necessary to an efficient, honest, and intelligent exercise of the franchise. And I believe further that they will require such a redistribution, or change in the distribution of seats, as shall give a more equal distribution of parliamentary power to the various bodies of electors scattered throughout the community of the kingdom. But of these three things which are necessary to be done, it seems to me quite obvious that that which is the most pressing is the question of the Suffrage;

because the five millions that are shut out, having no votes, can have no great interest in the ballot, and being themselves a class, as it were, excluded and violently shut out, they are not likely to take any strong interest whether Rochdale returns one member or two members, or whether Birmingham no more members than Clitheroe. Those are not the questions that can seriously interest and affect men who have no votes at all, and are therefore shut out for the most part from the consideration of public questions. I hold, therefore, that although the ballot is needed, and although small boroughs are a great evil, they are not of the nature of *class* grievances. They are *general* grievances. A class grievance is the exclusion of a great and whole class from political rights by a door which shuts down at £10 a year, when great bodies of the people live in houses at £5, £6, and £7. But another reason, I think, why we should **proceed first with the suffrage** is that opinion, as we all feel, is much more made up and much more ripe on the question of the suffrage than on either of the other questions. And we must recollect, too, that the exclusion of the working-classes from the franchise has formed the sole ground for the introduction of the various measures which have been brought into Parliament within the last fifteen years, with a view to the amendment of the Reform Act. Besides, if you turn back to the Parliamentary proceedings of 1859, you will find that Lord Derby, when he brought in a Bill which he called a Reform Bill, found his Bill rejected—and his Government rejected with it—and on the express ground that his Bill made no provision for the introduction of the working-classes to the elective franchise. Then again we have the special pledge of Lord Russell in 1859, and in the introduction of the last Reform Bill we have the special pledge of Mr. Gladstone in a very remarkable speech that he made in the House of Commons upon, I think, the

second reading of the Suffrage Bill moved by Mr. Baines. We have also what I may call the special demand of that great portion of the nation which is thus in my opinion wrongfully excluded. The working men do not ask now for the ballot, because they have no votes to shelter. They do not ask for an alteration in the distribution of the seats, for they have nothing to do with the election of members. What they do ask is, that they should be put upon the same platform, under the same law, received with the same favour, treated with the same great national trust, as all the other and richer classes of the community. And then another reason for proceeding by steps is this—that **a Suffrage Bill, pure and simple, will be much more easy to carry through Parliament.** I will tell you very soon why this is,—to introduce clauses and schedules for disenfranchising a number of small boroughs treads very painfully upon the toes of the representatives of these small boroughs. If I were a member for a borough of 260 electors, and returned, perhaps, chiefly by a sharp attorney of that little town, perhaps with my strong notions on this question I might be induced to vote for the suppression of that constituency; but still, even then, acting as their representative, I should feel it a question of some doubt whether I could honourably remain their representative and give such a vote, if it were wholly contrary to their wishes. You will see at once that if the Government proposed to disfranchise 20 or 30 small boroughs, and transfer their members to large boroughs and populous counties, they would find on their own side of the House a large number of members who, from various reasons—some commendable and some very much the contrary—would find it difficult to support the Bill. **I argue, therefore, that it would be an encumbrance to a Suffrage Bill at this moment to interfere with the distribution of seats. It would make**

it more difficult to carry the Bill, and whatsoever distribution of seats you could now make, must necessarily be trifling and unsatisfactory, and would leave that question still unsettled for even the shortest possible period. **This is not a new opinion of mine, for before the last Bill was introduced in the year 1859, I took the trouble to converse at length with members of the then Government, and with members of this present Government, urging them not to touch the redistribution of the seats at all at the time, but to bring in a Bill which should establish a sensible and rational suffrage throughout the country.** I said—

'You will carry that Bill much more easily; public opinion 'hereafter will be more ripe to deal with the question of 'distribution; and when there are a larger number of electors 'returning your members to Parliament—I mean a larger 'number in the different boroughs—you will have what a 'mechanic would call a long lever, and a better Parliament, by 'which you may deal more satisfactorily with the other ques-'tions which come before you.'

"There are some Liberals in the country who do not hold this opinion, and I had a letter from one the other day who was complaining very much of rumours that the Government do not intend to disfranchise small boroughs in this Bill. My answer to him was this: I told him I had thought of and considered this question as much as any man in England, and **I had come to the opinion that the Government would be doing right to treat the suffrage separately,** and that I thought I could give such reasons for this course to the reformers of the kingdom, that none of them would complain of the proceedings of the Government in this matter, except such as do not really understand their business as reformers.—*Daily Papers*, Jan. 4, 1866.

On Dec. 14, 1883, Mr. Bright addressed a meeting at Keighley. What was his counsel then? It was brief, but to the point, as the following extract will show:—

"There have been a good many points raised just lately in the discussion about what is called redistribution. **The question of re-arrangement—redistribution it is commonly called—is one which I hope will be left over until the Franchise Bill has been settled, until a further Session of Parliament.**"—*Daily Papers, Dec.* 15, 1883.

The self-refutation of Lord Salisbury, together with the exposition of Mr. Bright's opinions found in these pages, must dispel the hallucinations of the Tory leaders and the Tory party in claiming Mr. Bright as an advocate for the position which the Tory Peers have taken in the constitutional crisis through which the nation is now passing.

In conclusion, it is obvious that if the Tory Peers prove obdurate, and if they are 'vilified' for their contumacy, or to use the words of Lord Carnarvon, they are "scouted and denounced," it can never be said that "they are following the counsels of Mr. Bright."

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